

This lesson covers the final days of Jacob as he blesses Joseph's two sons and then later blesses all twelve of his sons immediately before his death. After the funeral the brothers of Joseph fear that he might now seek revenge because they had sold him into slavery but Joseph again expresses his forgiveness by reminding them that everything that happened was part of God's plan to save lives.

Verses 1-2: Joseph is told that Jacob is "sick" (the Hebrew word can indicate any physical weakness due to illness or injury) and he apparently fears his father may be nearing death. He takes his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, with him to go see his father. It's possible that Joseph believes that this may be his last chance to see his father alive and Jacob's last opportunity to bless Joseph's two sons.

Genesis 48

³ And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, ⁴ And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee *for an everlasting possession.*

Jacob reminds Joseph of his encounters with "God Almighty" (El Shaddai) at Luz (which he renamed as "Beth-el") in Gen. 28:11-15 and Gen. 35:10-15. On both occasions the LORD blessed him with the promises that He gave Jacob. Among the promises was God's promise to multiply Jacob's descendants and give the land of Canaan to them to possess eternally.

⁵ And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, *are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.*

In the context of the land being given to Jacob's descendants, Jacob promotes Joseph's two sons to the same level of inheritance as Jacob's other sons. Ephraim and Manasseh become their own tribes with equal inheritance among the other sons rather than being merely grandsons of Jacob. Reuben and Simeon were the oldest and second-oldest sons of Jacob but he elevates Ephraim and Manasseh to the same level of inheritance as his own two eldest sons. Reuben had forfeited his right as first-born son because of his sin (Gen 35:22) and now Joseph, in effect, is being given the double-portion of the inheritance through his two sons. This arrangement is explained a bit more in the genealogy given in chapter 5 of 1 Chronicles: **1 Chr. 5:1-2:** "¹ Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. ² For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's:)"

Verses 6-22: Jacob explains that if Joseph has any more sons, they will be considered as belonging to Joseph and will not have the same rank as Ephraim and Manasseh. Jacob notices Joseph's two sons standing in the room but does not recognize them due to his failing eyesight. When Joseph explains who they are, Jacob blesses them. However, he gives the superior blessing reserved for the first-born to the younger son, Ephraim, despite Joseph's protest. Ephraim will become a greater tribe in Israel than Manasseh.

Genesis 49

¹ And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you *that which shall befall you in the last days.*

Jacob sends messengers to call all his sons to himself so that he could bless them. The act of bestowing a blessing was typically more prophetic than the bestowing of a spiritual benefit. Jacob recognizes this and calls his sons to come and hear "that which shall befall you in the last days." The expression "last days" likely refers to "future" days rather than to the days just before the LORD comes back, as we normally think of today. Jacob wants to tell his sons what will happen to their descendants in the years ahead.

Verses 2-27: Jacob speaks a prophetic blessing over each of his sons, drawing from their past behavior as well as their current personalities.

²⁸ All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel: and this *is it* that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.

This verse summarizes the preceding verses, indicating that all twelve sons were included and each one had a blessing that was personalized for them.

²⁹ And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

Jacob had already caused Joseph to promise that he would not be buried in Egypt; now he repeats the command that he should be buried in Canaan in front of all of his sons. He names the specific location where he should be buried: the cave that Abraham had purchased to be the family burial cave.

Verses 30-32: Jacob explains that Abraham and Sarah are buried in this cave as well as Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob had buried his wife Leah there and he wants his sons to bury him there as well.

³³ And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.

Jacob must have been sitting on the edge of his bed facing his sons as he blessed them and gave them his instructions on where to bury him. He apparently had used the last of his strength in doing so, because now that he has finished he turns his body and pulls his feet into the bed so he can lie down. As he relaxes his breathing shallows and then he dies. The phrase “was gathered unto his people” is an expression meaning that Jacob went to be united with his ancestors. It is a beautiful and peaceful thing when a child of God goes on to be with the LORD.

Genesis 50:1-6: Joseph immediately begins mourning his father, weeping over him and kissing him goodbye. Joseph then had his father’s body embalmed according to Egyptian burial customs, a process that took 40 days. The Egyptians mourned for Jacob for 70 days, an honor usually reserved for royalty. Joseph then asks Pharaoh for permission to leave Egypt temporarily so that he can honor his father’s wishes to be buried in Canaan, a request that was granted.

Genesis 50

⁷ And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, ⁸ And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father’s house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. ⁹ And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company.

Joseph goes to Canaan to bury his father, accompanied by Pharaoh’s representatives and all the adult members of his family. They were also escorted by chariots and horsemen, creating a very large funeral party. This was basically a “state” funeral attended by government officials with Jacob being treated with the highest honors.

Verses 10-17: Joseph and his brothers bury Jacob in accordance with his wishes and then mourn for him another seven days before returning to Egypt. After they get back, the brothers become concerned that Joseph may have waited until after their father’s death to exact his revenge on them for their sins against him. They send a messenger to Joseph saying that it was their father’s desire that Joseph forgive his brothers and show them mercy. Joseph’s tender heart is evident because he weeps when he hears the message.

¹⁸ And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we *be* thy servants.

In addition to the message, the brothers also go in person to Joseph and humble themselves before him, submitting themselves to Joseph’s mercy. This time they are aware that they are again fulfilling the dreams that they had previously despised (Gen. 37:5-11) but now they understand that the dreams came from God.

¹⁹ And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for *am* I in the place of God?

We all need to pay attention to Joseph’s rhetorical question because we have all wanted to get revenge at some time in our life. Joseph had the authority to exact whatever revenge he wanted on his brothers and no one in Egypt would have questioned it. However, Joseph humbly refuses to avenge himself on his brothers because he recognizes that he is not God. As a human being he does not have the right for vengeance because:

1. **Vengeance belongs to the LORD:** The LORD says in **Deut. 32:35** “*To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.*” The LORD reserves the right of vengeance for Himself and to take vengeance ourselves is to say that we don’t trust Him to be just. Joseph is saying that he does not have to right to avenge himself upon his brothers because he is not God.
2. **Being sold into slavery was according to God’s plan:** Over the course of his journey from slavery to Pharaoh’s palace, Joseph had learned that God had a plan and the events that led him to his current position were orchestrated by God. To seek revenge on his brothers would be to challenge the will of God as if God had made a mistake, a foolish thing for him to do as a human being. Joseph understood that he had no right to substitute his own plan for God’s.

²⁰ But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.

“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” - Joseph doesn’t excuse what they did or sugar-coat it, for they did indeed intend evil upon Joseph. But the superseding principle was that “God meant it unto good.” God is able to use the evil intentions of men, guiding their consequences to bring his will to pass. **Rom. 8:28** “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*”

“to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” – Joseph understood that the reason that God had allowed the evil intentions of his brothers to bring him to Egypt was to fulfill God’s purpose of rescuing countless people from starvation.

²¹ Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Joseph expresses his forgiveness and love for them by assuring them that he will provide for them and their children.

Verses 22-26: Joseph lives to the age of 110, being able to see his great-grandchildren grow up. On his death bed Joseph reminds the children of Israel of God’s promise to Jacob that He would bring the children of Israel back to the land of Canaan. He makes them promise that when it happens they will take his bones back to Canaan with them to be buried.